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PROGRESS AND THE ACADEMIC SPIRIT

By ALBERT SHAW, PH. D., LL. D.

Practical men are often puzzled, though seldom convinced, when modern scholars cast doubt upon the reality of progress. The dialectic method can indeed be used to prove or disprove any thesis. But the inductive scientist must surely believe in the real value of knowledge, and in the substantial advances that he and his fellows have made in their own particular fields.

Assuredly, knowledge has made vast progress in these latter days. If the advance in one department has seemed more rapid and startling than in some other, it is true, nevertheless, that every spokesman for his own kind of study will set forth a dazzling summary of progressive achievement.

On more than one great anniversary occasion in recent years, academic authorities have coöperated to produce in published form some conspectus of the results of modern inquiry, and of the existing state of knowledge in recognized departments of research or scholarly effort. The result is a picture that strikes the ordinary mind as marvelously brilliant and hopeful. The array of facts and inferences in summaries of that kind has helped in no small measure to produce the current optimism about human worth, and the reality of individual and social progress.

Perhaps the best explanation of some phases of dubiety and pessimism in academic circles is that they are due at once to modesty and to intense concentration. Every man who pursues the truth in any field of scholarship is indeed a man who serves the race to which he belongs. But he may not be the best man to judge of the direct or the indirect value to society of his own kind of work; nor, indeed, may he be a competent judge of those things that characterize social progress.

The academic spirit seeks repose and order; and, behold! all about us is social ferment, the haste of crowds, the appeal to sensation, the noisy wrangling of the market-place, the restless pursuit of petty aims. Economic society is at strife within itself; and its forces menace one another. Democracies govern crudely; and are victimized, now by the plutocrats, and now by the demagogues. Ethical standards seem obscured; and greed and force appear to be the dominant motives in our so-called "civilization," as among men in ages of savagery. All this social ferment, this swirl and tumult of restless masses, is not very pleasing to any man who has a classic instinct for harmony and order, and it is naturally disturbing to those whose pursuits are scientific or academic.

Yet I hold that the academic world should not disavow what has been its own work. If the social ferment is essentially bad, we must condemn those who have sought the paths of knowledge and set free the results of their research. The modern world, with its crude democracies, its economic and industrial striving, its great masses of shifting population, its restless clamor for this or that to meet new and unsatisfied wants, is the world that has been made for us, not by the statesmen or the men of military prowess, or the captains of industry, but by the scientists and the scholars. It is a world in which more than a thousand millions of men are seething, in a spirit of new-born energy, of discontent, of aroused hope, of awakened perception. Profound indeed were the upheavals four generations ago that shattered the medieval order. But the movements of our day are more universal by far, and more constructive in their seeking after a higher fulfillment of life.

At what chapter, in this great epic of modern progress, the love of humanity enters as a ruling passion or even as a conscious motive, I am not able to decide. Your biologist may not seem a very sympathetic soul. In the proper division of effort, it may be just as well that the man of laboratory research should

not have the precise point of view about human society that impels the settlement worker. But your men of science are none the less responsible for the new social conditions. And by degrees they find themselves ministering to them.

These new conditions mean concrete changes so rapid and so startling as to be almost beyond belief. Very much of this period of social transformation falls within the compass of the memory of some of those whom I address today. A great part of it is contemporary with the scant forty years' work of this university. Further than that, this university is in no small measure accountable for it, and can take its share of the credit or of the blame.

Modern industry and transportation had earlier created as a distinct entity the urbanized center of factories and commerce, inhabited by masses of people. During the first three quarters of the last century the conditions of life in these towns were destructive. Death rates far exceeded birth rates; infant mortality was appalling; poverty due to physical and moral decay was in bold evidence; slum neighborhoods were existent in all large towns and were regarded as inevitable. The percentage of individuals physically defective and morally delinquent was high. The congenital criminal was no myth, but a concrete fact, multifarious and menacing. The better class of people shivered on the fringes of the abyss, and sometimes the crumbling banks submerged them also.

For, to drop the figure of speech, epidemics came up like tidal waves from the slums, and the fashionable avenues were also scourged. Slums are not yet wholly extinct, but it is easily safe to say that their end is near. It has been more than a battle; it has been a great and thrilling war, this struggle to change the character of the modern industrial city so that men, women and children might be able to *live* where conditions compelled them to *work*.

A hundred years ago there were men who perceived and described the evils of these centers of disease, vice and crime. But for half a century the social reformer could make little headway. The change began to come about when science offered an array of new weapons. Science, working by its own methods of research and in the academic spirit, had made a series of great discoveries, notable among which were those associated in the layman's mind with the word "bacteriology." There were many others less direct and immediate in their bearing, but far-reaching in their practical consequences.

With the disappearance of epidemics, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, the opportunity came for successive steps in preventive medicine, health administration, and human betterment that expressed itself in many ways besides reduction of the death rate. The problems relating to human health and individual efficiency have been subjected to an ever-closer analysis and differentiation. Hundreds of these problems have been referred back, for scientific study, to men of the academic spirit and method. These new problems have been referred not merely to the bacteriologist or the physiologist; they have gone also to the chemist and to the physicist; they have engaged the psychologist and the student of educational theory and method; naturally enough, they have challenged the political economist and the student of the subjects connoted by the word "sociology." They have found their way into the lecture rooms of men concerned with the history of human culture, with philology and all the learning about the races of men, their contacts, their civilizations, their artistic achievements, and all their ways of living and thinking. This is not a whimsical point of view, nor a bit of mere special pleading. The vast and startling phenomena of current social change are results of the application of knowledge to the problems of health and education.

Within the memory of men now living, smallpox was a scourge that was always raging in one or another of the world's

population centers with frightful devastation. In like manner typhoid fever was an everpresent evil, which from time to time became epidemic in extent. Asiatic cholera and yellow fever swept from port to port and from city to city. Science with sure steps is advancing from the elimination of these great plagues to the conquest over tuberculosis as a menace of large proportions, and to the relief of society from the other infectious and contagious disorders that slaughter the innocent and disgrace the name of civilization.

There can be no real doubt about these changes in human life and society that have resulted, in our generation, from the scientific study of life itself in its normal and in its morbid phases. If one seeks the test of statistics, the answer comes in the terms of average death rates. When in the course of half a century the death rate of a great city is reduced from 40 or 50 per thousand to 14 or 15 per thousand, it requires very little imagination to see what this must mean in all the practical aspects of town life. It means a great prolongation of the average age of adults. It means a rapid reduction of the number of cases of illness, and a corresponding increase in average personal efficiency. It means a swift transition from the morbid and abnormal toward the wholesome and normal.

This is apparent enough apart from statistics to the keen observer who has had experience covering a long period of years. We were told, a generation ago, that society had begun to invoke swift deterioration and decay, through applying its new kinds of knowledge to its own welfare and protection. We were warned against interfering with the natural working of the law of the "survival of the fittest." Those who were translating these new discoveries of science into the terms of social reform and improved administration were sneered at as misguided enthusiasts and shallow optimists. And some of those who believed in the new scientific knowledge, and who had all the patience and disinterestedness requisite for successful research, were themselves

somewhat hesitant about the application of this knowledge to suffering humanity.

It was, however, a mere assumption—a clever argumentative attitude with little to sustain the thesis—that human society could from any standpoint be better off by reason of the prevalence of disease, vice, crime, ignorance, or warfare—whether the surviving warfare of hostile tribes, or the new warfare of unregulated industry.

There is also a science of society, which has made progress in spite of doubt and deprecation. And this science has found ways to establish the truth that the individual members of a community are so bound together by manifold relationships as to constitute an entity which has its laws and principles, and which is in some respects analogous to an organism in the biological sense. This social organism cannot suffer in one part and be sound in another. Its physical, mental and moral progress must rightly be considered from the standpoint of the whole.

It is not the point of view, either of the scientist or of the reformer who applies scientific knowledge, that the unfortunate victims of former social maladies should be so coddled and encouraged as to give a permanent and hereditary character to the defective and the abnormal. The breeding of criminals, cripples, paupers, and idiots was by far more prevalent under the old conditions of neglect than under the new conditions which are applying scientific study to a hundred differentiated problems having to do with physical defects, with mental disorders, and with moral delinquencies.

You may go from New York to San Francisco, from Glasgow to London, from Munich to Budapest, and everywhere you will find a more normal and promising type of childhood than twenty-five years ago. This healthier and better average child is the resultant product of research in a vast number of different lines of study—research conducted in the serene and

academic spirit of love for truth, and of belief in the value of high intellectual effort. Scholarship and research give their results to the world. And these results come to be utilized through the growth of new sciences which are themselves fully worthy of academic recognition. They are based upon the accepted fact that society itself is a proper subject of inquiry and treatment.

Administration, from this standpoint, becomes a science, as well as a profession. In its capacity as a science it grasps the principles and discoveries that can be utilized in the field of preventive medicine for the protection of society against communicable diseases; and in its capacity as a profession it seeks efficient and economical ways to apply its knowledge. Administration accepts the principles worked out by psychologists, relating to the development of mental and moral qualities in children, and applies them in the working out of a scheme of universal education.

There is also a comparatively new science and profession, dealing with that social force that we call "public opinion." The sentiments and determination of a community have to be observed from the standpoint of education and from that of political science. The creation and wise direction of public opinion have to be studied, and one is led to consider the significance of the press and the platform as great public agencies and instruments.

All of these forces—those that relate to the study of human life and disease, those that relate to the mind and its qualities, those that have to do with social groups—have had their part in producing this child of new and better promise in our great modern hives of industry. And in regard to no other aspect of all the complex phenomena of modern life do I make assertions with so much confidence as when I say that the more thorough and the more profound the researches of science—the more perfect the academic spirit of search for truth by the best means at hand—the more potent in the end are the social results.

One of the most striking things consequent upon the new conditions that are at work in society is the fact of shifting populations. The coming of ten millions of strangers from Europe to this one country of ours, during the past ten years, represents a population movement so large in volume and so significant in character as to stand almost or quite without parallel in the history of mankind. This arises in part from the rapidity of the numerical growth of population, due to the profound new conditions affecting human life and its maintenance. Consider for an instant the actual expansion of population in civilized countries since 1850. I need not cite statistics; you are familiar with them. The European languages are spoken by about four times as many people as a single century ago.

Much of this new population—as in Germany and England, for instance—can be employed at home through the amazing growth of industry, which in turn has been due to scientific and technical progress. Germany, for instance, supports seventy millions today in a far better average condition of health, mental advancement and social well-being than was the condition of her forty millions only forty years ago.

Behind all the progress of industry which has so greatly enhanced the producing power of the individual, and has so multiplied and cheapened many things that were once luxuries and that are now of common use, is the man of the laboratory, working in biology or chemistry or physics. This new period of science has created within a few decades more productive capital than existed in the world before. The employment of new productive capital has been attended with many dangers and evils of its own, but science is applying itself to the remedy of those dangers and evils, as they are differentiated for study. Expressed in terms of average result, this new industrial age is shortening the hours of toil, is making a demand for intelligent and normal workers, and is humanizing, rather than brutalizing, in its tendencies.

It is cooperating with all the forces that are abolishing poverty through the elimination of its causes. Thus the growth of industry permits the numerical increase of population, while also helping to provide the means for the average improvement of the individual type. Science, furthermore, lies behind the shifting and equalizing of populations. But for recondite studies in several scientific fields, we should not have had that evolution of marine architecture and propulsive force that has made possible the shifting of millions of people in a single year from the more populous to the less developed parts of the world. For, besides the obvious triumphs of engineering and of technology in different special departments, the facilities of transportation have required the work of the mathematician, the physicist, and the chemist.

The changes in the modern world, then, as I hold, have been due to scientific discovery and the diffusion of knowledge. The study of the forces and laws of nature created the age of capitalized industry. The result was the massing of populations under conditions which were fraught at first with physical and moral disasters. The further study of the laws and forces of nature as applied to human life found ways to meet those accelerated evils, so that unfavorable environments were transformed until there dawned upon men's minds the possibility of converting those very contacts that had been so harmful into a means of individual and social benefit. The visions that had appeared to men's minds, as dreams of human perfectibility, began to be worked out in solid terms of administrative practice.

Phases of human struggle and social strife, indeed, remained; and the tumult and fury seemed, to the undiscerning and to the doubtful, to be leading humanity from bad states to worse. Those capable of discerning, however, could see that what had once been the sheer *struggle for existence* had become transformed into the wholesome and hope-inspired *struggle for higher welfare*, and for the realization of ideals. This vast ferment, in industrial society, shows marks of strength and intelligence, rather than of weakness and despair.

Science is giving us the well-conditioned individual. And out of the multiplication of well-conditioned individuals we are to construct the new, well-conditioned democratic society. It is not hunger and despair that move millions of men from Europe to the less populated countries of North and South America, but rather it is the new impulse of awakened intelligence and hope. I am aware that this statement might be misunderstood. All generalizations are meant for the generalizing mind, trained to make comparisons. For, indeed, some elements of this shifting population are not as perfectly selected as one might choose, out of which to evolve the composite American race of the future. And yet the generalization is true. Dominant throughout the great migratory mass of the past decade or two is the spirit of hope and the purpose to find favorable environment, due to the new ideals that have been made common among the peoples of all Western nations.

Thus while science studies and improves the physique and the mentality of the child, bringing it up towards a higher normal, and while education strives to adapt its methods so that it may fit this child for his part as a worker, a citizen, and a right-minded member of society, we find science also dealing with the new questions arising from the needs and demands of society in the mass. Out of the old principle, expressed in the poor law and in schemes of alms-giving, that society must support the burden of pauperism, we find new and wonderful evolutions, both of doctrine and of practice. We now deal with poverty at its sources. We combat disease, alcoholism, and sheer ignorance. We begin to perceive that the dread of poverty in old age, which has been the most prevalent fear of men and women since the break-up of feudalism, can for the most part be removed by a scientific reform in public administration. Old-age pensions, on the principle of social insurance, can obviously be substituted for a scheme of public charity that perforce converted old men and women into dependents and paupers. The scientific analysis of poverty,

based upon statistics, close observation, and medical research, is leading us by sure steps, not merely to its proper treatment, but to its relative, if not complete, elimination.

The conditions of a newer country had made these problems less exigent in America than in Germany or England. But we have now begun to apply science to the social problems of democracy with a proper study of experience elsewhere, and with an assurance of the value of the means to be employed, that arises from the use of scientific methods in the academic spirit. It would be easy to specify scores of matters of a concrete kind to illustrate the advances that society is making or has clearly conceived, with scientific sanction as the basis.

The great conflict now going on for adjustment and equalization is in no large sense one destructive of valuable things. It is chiefly destructive of conditions and institutions that are outworn and can be dispensed with. It is destructive, for instance, of famine and pestilence. These things at one time had their value as keeping population down to the subsistence line. But the survivors under that system were enfeebled and impoverished, and subsistence was scanty in kind and in amount, because productive energy was lacking.

Modern efficiency not only saves populations, but it invigorates them, enhances their power to produce, habituates them to the complex wants of a higher civilization, and stimulates them to discoveries which render possible the satisfying of those wants. Mental and moral defects and abnormalities are wholly out of keeping with this new social progress based upon the normal ideal of the sound mind and the sound body. The disciplines of life on the one hand, and its hopes and opportunities on the other hand, are unquestionably giving us results that strengthen faith in the fight against cruelty, injustice, blighting ignorance, and established wrong.

The flocking of population to the cities, under the modern requirements of industrial life, produced so many glaring and

menacing social dangers than science and philanthropy gave their attention especially to the amelioration of town life. The result has been that already the conditions in cities and towns are more favorable and more agreeable than those in the country districts. Whereas the death rate in towns was, half a century ago, incomparably greater than that of the country districts, it is now, in most cases, smaller. Opportunities for conserving health, for obtaining the education of children, for advancement in occupations, and for pleasure and culture, are greater in the towns than in the broad expanses of farm country.

The growth of population is outstripping the production of food. Science has accomplished relatively far less in the study of agriculture, and in the advancement of rural life, than in most other directions. Research in many phases of this agricultural problem has been earnestly undertaken with much promise, and with results that begin already to be appreciable. But science is only at the threshold of its work in that great field. We have depleted the soil, from one ocean to the other, by wasteful methods. We are now trying to learn how to conserve the physical resources of the country, chief of which is the soil, for the well-being of a population that is steadily increasing and that must be fed.

Even the so-called "scientific agriculture" of our day is for the most part tentative and empirical. There is, indeed, much value to be derived from better and more intelligent application of existing knowledge. The country school is decayed and obsolete. It had a function fifty or seventy-five years ago that has been fulfilled. It must be made over into a wholly different institution. It must be a vital center of real intelligence for the region about it. The new applications of science to the physical and mental life of town populations, and to their economic and social problems, must be brought to bear upon the life of our farming population spread out over a hundred thousand townships.

This is to be the greatest practical work for our scientific and educational statesmen during the coming generation. The conditions of our rural populations are far worse, upon the average, than those of our town people. There is more of human decay, more of the survival of those bad conditions of the stagnant life of earlier periods, in the country than in the city. The evils to be met require not merely zeal and organization, but the highest kind of scientific study and intelligence.

The obligation is the greater because our men of science are now the accepted guides and guardians of our economic and social future. We have millions of farmers, for example, who are making effort and are seeking knowledge. And they have been already so much benefited by invention and science that they have abandoned the skepticism of ignorance, and now base their hopes for the future upon authoritative sources of knowledge. They are looking with even more eagerness than results have as yet justified to the research work of the agricultural schools and experiment stations. They no longer believe that the farmer can be saved by mere nostrums, whether of political or of medical quacks. But behind the work of the agricultural colleges and experiment stations, which is now at least hopeful and often valuable, there is a great field for the more fundamental research of scientists, and men of the academic rather than the professional or economic attitude of mind.

Society will continue, in this present-day struggle, to find adjustment, balance, harmony. These dynamic conditions seem to me hopeful rather than alarming. Population movements are not nowadays taking the form of vandal hordes moving defiantly upon the approved structures of civilization. Whatsoever has been tested and found good is in no great danger. Migration is in the constructive spirit for families and regions. Doubtless there is some loss of valuable things in the rapidity of modern change. But the gains are greater than the losses, no matter what tests are applied, provided the tests be thorough.

Through all the transformations of outward phenomena, there are some things that bind the ancient and the modern worlds together. There are high ranges in which the human mind and spirit continue to be undisturbed. The pursuit of truth, in the disinterested spirit, in these days as in all times, brings its compensations. Upon the man of academic training this service of knowledge becomes an imperious obligation. It must permeate more and more the spirit in which men apply knowledge in practical ways.

By which I mean that public spirit and unselfish motive must increasingly dominate the practice of professions. The more scholarly your medical work, the less temptation to commercialize either ideas or skill. The more valuable your studies of history, politics, and jurisprudence, the more strong the impulse to serve the cause of justice among men in the legal profession or in public service, without the spirit of private greed. The pursuits of commerce and industry themselves may well tend to become public-spirited, rather than private-spirited, and to minister more and more to the welfare of all workers; so that the strifes of competition and the clashes of capital and labor may have diminishing areas, while harmony and coöperative effort may increasingly triumph.

While, therefore, the normal and practical man must believe in the reality of progress, it does not follow that the speculative mind will wholly cease to question or to doubt. Whither does it all tend? We shall conserve human life increasingly, and we shall derive fourfold or tenfold more food value from the acre of cultivated soil. Mr. Wells and the novelists of scientific imagination, with their quick grasp of new inventions and discoveries, are pointing out possible spheres of human advancement that make the dreams of our old-fashioned Utopian philosophers seem very commonplace and stale.

But if men are to lean solely upon utilitarian codes of conduct, and are to aim solely at material well-being and at a nor-

mal roundness of the physical and mental personality, what motive power will be great enough to impel the generations to live at their best, and to transmit their diffused power of harmonious life to their successors? Must mankind move in great cycles of decay and recuperation? Must dark ages succeed bright ones? Who can answer these searching questions of life and destiny?

At least the scientific world finds increasing power to believe that there is a great realm of things spiritual, into which mankind may yet enter more fully than ever before; and to the layman it does not seem inconsistent to believe that the kind of human progress to which I have been referring in these casual suggestions today may tend strongly towards a higher apprehension of spiritual needs and possibilities. There may also be a development of the sciences of the spiritual life and nature; so that the motive power that must guide and energize all human activity may not only be studied by finer methods, but be strengthened by wiser applications.

Towards this development of man's spiritual life—which must sustain the will power that alone can give sequence and assured future to his mundane efforts and triumphs, there is no cultural study that will not have contributed in due measure. A true knowledge of the history of religions might have saved mankind from the calamity and disgrace of decimating religious wars. There can be no knowledge of the finer experiences and achievements of men that can be neglected without disaster. The qualities of the human spirit that produced ancient cults, and expressed themselves in codes of ethics and works of art, are entitled to be studied, because the human spirit is of inestimable dignity and worth, and all things of value, present and to come, are dependent upon its high impulses.

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